DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 714 CS 508 833

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TITLE On the Problematic Nature of Conducting Research among American Indians (Research in Progress).
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Culture; *American Indians; *Communication Research; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Background; *Ethnography; Higher Education; Nonverbal Communication; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Behavior

ABSTRACT

The American Indian, whether as a racial group or tribal group, is presumably the most researched group in the United States. Every aspect of Indian culture has been studied from topics such as "uses of time" to "forms of public speaking." Although the Indian has been thoroughly studied, there is a lack of current research that identifies and delineates Indian verbal and non-verbal behavior. Moreover, those who would conduct research among the indigenous people seldom take into account the notion of cultural competency or the knowledge and day-to-day enactment of cultural ways. Almost all researchers consider any person who identifies him- or herself as an Indian as being culturally competent. However, many tribal members have been socialized in an urban or non-Indian environment and possess scant knowledge of their tribal background. The problem then is this: when conducting research among American Indians should the researcher be concerned with the cultural expertise of his or her subjects? How does he or she determine contemporary Indian communicative behavior? L. Wieder and S. Pratt (1990) found that being an Indian or culturally competent tribal member "is not something one can simply be, but is something one becomes and/or is." The problem of identity is not merely a problem for scholarly investigation; it is also a problem that Indian people face in both inter-cultural, inter-tribal and intra-tribal settings. (Osage Tribal Competency Exam is appended.) (TB)

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On The Problematic Nature of Conducting Research Among American Indians

(Research in Progress)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ON THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH AMONG AMERICAN INDIANS

ABSTRACT

The American Indian, whether as a racial group or tribal group, is presumably the most researched group in the United States. Every aspect of Indian culture has been studied from topics such as "uses of time" to "forms of public speaking". Although the Indian has been thoroughly studied, there is a lack of current research which identifies and delineates Indian verbal and non-verbal behavior. Moreover, for those who would conduct research among the indiginous people seldom has the notion of cultural competency or the knowledge and day-to-day enactment of cultural ways, been taken into account. When working with minorities, particularly American Indians, researchers are inclined to afford complete cultural competency upon anyone who is identified, or self-identifies as an Indian. Almost all researchers consider any person who identifies as an Indian as being culturally competent. However, many tribal members have been socialized in a urban or non-Indian environment and possess scant knowledge of their tribal background. The problem then is this: When conducting research among American Indians should we be concerned with the cultural expertise of our subjects? Are we actually testing, describing and reporting Indian communicative behavior or testing, describing and reporting European-American behavior? Therefore, our question is: Should researchers be concerned with whether or not communicative behavior comes from a traditional Indian or tribal perspective and how do we determine what constitutes contemporary Indian communicative behavior? In this paper we will attempt to answer this question by describing: (a.) the contemporary Indian experience, (b.) labeling as a measure of ethnic identity, (c.) problems encountered in research, and (d.) suggestions for conducting research.

ON THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH AMONG AMERICAN INDIANS

"if one were to try to understand a certain group of people, one would look for the expressive forms through which they represent themselves to themselves (and to others)"... Griswold, (p.51).

INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily, most people have a pre-conceived notion of the lifestyle and history of the American Indian. Generally, this notion is based upon information learned from sources such as schools, personal experience, experiences of others, and the media. For many, this pre-conceived image of the Indian is that of the homogenous picture depicted in books and movies of the "old west."

However, the "old west" image is not indicative of the varying images of contemporary Indian culture. Tribal or Indian culture has not been in a static state as often depicted in the media, but has been in a state of flux, changing and adapting as the environment has changed. Consequently, the expressive forms of communicative behavior that functioned successfully in the past have been modified and/or replaced by communicative behaviors reflective of this change.

Realizing that Indian culture is in a state of constant change it should be noted that most tribal members, particularly those in urban areas, have also altered .how they live their lives. Tribal members no longer speak their languages and most often are socialized in settings in which Indian or tribal lifestyle is rarely enacted. This is problematic for the urban or non-reservation Indian in that they have not been taught or exposed to their tribal language and/or cultural behaviors.

As a result of this lack of "cultural education" the contemporary Indian has little knowledge of traditional lifestyle and/or the expressive forms of tribal or Indian communicative behavior. Often, for those who lack this cultural expertise, their self-image or cultural identity is that of the homogenous image of a "pretend Indian," created by the media and other external

socializing forces. Therefore, it is difficult to identify those who "know" how to appropriately present themselves to others as a culturally competent Indian from those who do not.

Statement of the Problem

For those who would do research among Indians this becomes problematic. When studying the communicative behavior of American Indians we obviously use Indians as subjects, survey respondents and as resource people to demonstrate or to show us particular behaviors. However, those that self-identify, and are identified by others as Indians often do not know how to comport themselves as an Indian but more appropriately as a European-American. The problem then is this: When conducting research among American Indians should we be concerned with the cultural expertise of our subjects? Are we actually testing, describing and reporting Indian communicative behavior or testing, describing and reporting European-American behavior? Therefore, our question is: Should researchers be concerned with whether or not communicative behavior comes from a traditional Indian or tribal perspective and how do we determine what constitutes contemporary Indian communicative behavior?

In this paper we will attempt to answer this question by describing: (a.) the contemporary Indian experience, (b.) labeling as a measure of ethnic identity, (c.) problems encountered in research, and (d.) suggestions for conducting research.

ON DEFINING THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN EXPERIENCE

In the early part of this century it was relatively simple to define the "Indian" experience, which would more accurately be described as a "tribal" experience. Tribes lived apart from each other, spoke their own language and engaged in tribal specific activities. In essence, the interpretation of the environment and subsequent interaction was created by a tribal-specific template which was utilized to reduce the ambiguity of their world. Cultural elements such as world view, time, space, concepts of the sacred and the profane were based upon this particular tribal template as opposed to some generalized cultural or Indian experience.

During this period Indian tribes were unique, independent of each other and were treated by the United States government as sovereign nations which practiced traditional forms of government, e.g., hereditary leadership. A person's identity was derived from interaction within a specific tribe rather than one based upon a generalization of "Indian." One's tribal or cultural identity was not questioned, e.g., one was either an Osage or Kiowa or not an Osage or Kiowa. Thus, a person's cultural competency or knowledge of "traditional ways" was not questioned; it was taken-for-granted that all members experienced life from their tribal perspectives.

Today, it is difficult to write about a specific tribal or Indian experience since the concept of this particular lifestyle has drastically changed. Over the years, most tribes, some more so than others, have continued to move further from their basic nature. Factors such as relocation to reservation or urban areas, loss of language, and prohibitions from practicing religious activities have contributed to the cultural demise of many North American tribes.

What is important to note is that although tribal members attempted to hold on to a traditional lifestyle the tribal way of life began to deteriorate and change was inevitable. Forced assimilation began to have its effect with many tribal members moving away from the reservation and not returning. Concomitantly, tribes began experiencing the loss of elders and other culturally competent members who had traditionally been responsible for teaching cultural behaviors. As a result of the relocation of tribal members to urban or non-reservation areas and loss of culturally competent members the concept of "tribal-ness" was gradually replaced with "Indian-ness."

Indian identity is not the same as tribal identity, although belonging to a tribe is a constituent of Indian-ness. Tribal identity is derived from an adherence to and acceptance of a unique lifestyle. All tribes have differing languages and customs but under the rubric of Indian it is a generalization of a combination of various tribal lifeways, thus, it is this generalizability that creates Indian-ness. (For more on the notion of "Indian-ness, see Appendix A.)

Cultural dress and ceremonial behavior provide a mechanism in which members can appropriately portray their "Indian-ness" to themselves and to others. Many tribes have become eclectic by adopting differing tribal ceremonial behaviors and clothing. However, once these "borrowed" behaviors are enacted, they tend to become a part of the borrowing tribes ceremonial behavior. For the neo-Indian, this image of Indian-ness is that which has been presented in the media. To observe an example of this neo-Indian or eclectic phenomenon, all one has to do is visit the nearest pow-wow or attend a substance abuse conference. In either one of these venues you will see members of various tribes adopting the behaviors of other tribes either in dress or in cultural/ceremonial activities.

ON THE NOTION OF LABELING: INDIAN OR NATIVE AMERICAN?

The 90's has brought about an awareness of how people view themselves and how others view them based upon the label utilized. This era has seen the movement from utilizing racial epithets to attempting to become "politically correct" or utilizing non-offensive labels. Yet, in conducting research among native people researchers often do not consider the attitude that native people have towards the labels that are utilized to describe them. It appears that researchers are not familiar with the connotations that native people associate with the labels of Indian, American Indian, and Native American.

As the "native" experience has changed so has the construct associated with the label or term "Indian". Originally, the indigenous peoples of North America were categorized or referred to as Indians by European-Americans. Although the native people were grouped under the rubric of Indian the social and cultural identity of the native people was derived from their tribal affiliation, e.g., one was either an Osage or a Kiowa, and not from the construct of Indian. Too, for most European-Americans the term Indian was not always used in a positive manner. During the early 1950's there were many negative stereotypes associated with the label and many native people began denying their heritage and attempted to "assimilate" into the dominant culture. It was during the era that many took advantage of

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's relocation program and moved away from the reservations to urban areas. Consequently, many chose to be identified as an American and adapt to western lifestyle rather than to identify as an Indian and adhere to a tribal lifestyle.

As Indian lifestyle began to evolve the label of Indian also began to change. During the early 1970's native people and non-native sympathizers began to recognize the predicament, or "plight", of the Indian and felt that geographically and culturally the term was incorrect. In order to make the term more acceptable American was added to the Indian label, i.e., American Indian, in an effort to change the negative stereotypes associated with the name.

The label of Indian or American Indian was utilized until the "turn on, tune in, drop out" era of the 70's and was once again modified. During this era of political enlightenment, the socially conscious, and those who felt they were robbed of their cultural heritage determined that the term Indian or American Indian: (1) was pejorative, (2) did not describe their perception of their origin, (3) was not reflective of their contemporary image and began to refer to themselves and others as Native Americans.

In a discussion of African-American communication, Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, (1993), discussed a similar occurrence of cultural labeling as a construct of identity. They found that "Identity types seem to coalesce around group labels or names" (p. 72). They found that the labels Black, Black American, and African American (as evolved from Afro American) were the most frequent labels and each label had differing significance in terms of identity for those who utilized the labels. That is, as the cultural experience began to change so did the image associated with the current label. In order to be perceived differently a new label had to be utilized.

Let us consider the following examples in which an attempt is made to resolve this issue; Indians or Native Americans? Locke, 1992, in a discussion of how to appropriately counsel native clients found that ambiguity exists about the name that should be used to describe the client population (p. 46). He notes that historically, the name Indian was used, followed by American Indian and more recently, Native American. Although, he finds no consensus as to

the most appropriate term, he prefers Native American because, to him, it connotes both the heritage of the original inhabitants of this continent and the group's current status as United States citizens. It should be important to note that Locke did not survey any of the native population to determine which label was more acceptable, but preferred to impose his own label.

Morris and Wander (1990) in writing about Indian rhetoric also chose the label Native American "over and against other options, (e.g.; 'Indians', 'American Indians', etc.)" (p. 186). They discovered there did not appear to be any consensus among these cultures and that many of their members regarded the term "Indian" as derogatory. For them, the term Indian implies a single people, mysteriously descended from the people of the Indies. The authors "recognize that Native American is a conceptual error insofar as it is equally applicable to native peoples in North, Central and South America" (p. 186). However they "prefer this conceptual error over the derogatory, geographically suspect, and analytically over-simplified options" (p. 186). In this case the authors did not survey the native population to determine which label was preferred, but opted to impose their own label.

Although most researchers prefer the label Native American, the authors of this article, who are both native people, prefer the term Indian in describing their identity. The authors, who were both socialized in traditional environments, base their choice of rubric from the preference of their family members and tribal elders. Whenever their elders and family members would make reference to their "own people" they would refer to them as either Osage or Kiowa but when talking about other tribal groups they would call them "Indian people." Native American was never a term used by traditional tribal people and the authors seldom utilize the term when referring to native people.

Labeling as a Measure of Ethnic Identity

Labeling is important to the group members as "labeling and their associated meanings provide a useful measure of ethnic identity" (Hecht, et al, 1993, p. 68). In an effort to be politically correct we are faced with the problem of "how do we define or label the people we

are studying? Are they Indians, American Indians, or Native Americans? It seems that those who identify as Indian tend to have frequent tribal contact, are uni-tribal, and generally reside in rural or reservation areas. Conversely, those who identify as Native American tend to have less interaction with a specific tribal group, are multi-tribal, live in urban areas and tend to be more eclectic.

Moreover, cultural labeling is "one aspect of language that is related to identity maintenance and evolution" (Hecht, et al, 1993, p. 68). A cultural label tells group members how to present themselves to members of their own group and to out-group members. When a cultural label is utilized as a form of identification a person is placed in a category in which specific characteristics and personality traits are assigned which are utilized in predicting the behavior of the person. This label allows us to reduce the ambiguity of meeting someone with whom we have had no prior interaction. By placing someone in a category such as Indian, we already know what topics to discuss and how to interact with them. That is, we only see that person based upon stereotypes associated with the cultural label.

In summary, most researchers tend to utilize the term which they believe best describes their concept of the people they are studying. Most communication researchers tend to favor the term Native American although Indian is used interchangeably throughout research articles describing communicative behaviors.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RESEARCHING INDIANS

When conducting research, the notion of cultural competency is not addressed, therefore as social scientists we should be concerned with whether or not we are actually testing and identifying Indian or tribal communicative behavior. Further we should be concerned with identifying and delineating what Indian or tribal behavior is.

The communicative behavior of the American Indian has primarily been studied from an a priori perspective. Rather than attempting to identify specific cultural speech behaviors, e.g.,

compliance gaining, listening, contemporary research has glossed observable cultural communicative acts into European-American behavior.

Contributing further to this problematic nature is the notion that there is not one type of Indian identity nor a standard set of behaviors that can be generalized to all Indians. The contemporary Indian has little knowledge of tribal background; most have not been socialized in a traditional environment and the behaviors they exhibit are more akin to European-American. A traditional environment being one in which the tribal language is spoken and tribal behaviors are enacted on a daily basis with full understanding of the significance of tribal acts.

For example American Indians have been identified as having the highest drop-out rate of any group in the United States, yet the number of Indians attending college has steadily increased over the past decade. Much of the qualitative research that is conducted among Indians takes place on the college campus. Therefore, it appears for many researchers, whoever self-identifies as an Indian, or is identified by others, is afforded cultural competency regardless of whether or not they had any contact with Indian people. That is, based upon self-identification, they are considered to possess cultural specific communicative behaviors and interpret their world from a cultural template. Although it is known that culture is learned and not inherent, many researchers have decided from an a priori perspective that all Indians have been born with culture. However, in most instances what is measured quantitatively or qualitatively, is in actuality, contemporary European-American behavior. Let us consider the following situation with regards to cultural competency being instantly awarded.

Recently, members of a northeast Oklahoma tribe elected a woman as the tribe's first supreme court justice. She and other Indian women leaders from throughout the United States were invited to the nation's capital to meet with First Lady Hilary Clinton to discuss issues effecting contemporary Indian life. After the meeting with the first lady, the supreme court justice was featured in a major newspaper as a role model for all Indian people. She was depicted holding a blanket with an Indian design and a turkey feather fan, which no

tribally-competent leader would be depicted with. This woman was from a major metropolitan city, did not have any direct ties or contact with the tribe prior to her campaigning, and had never participated in any tribal activities. Although the supreme court justice was culturally incompetent (not familiar with tribal or Indian culture) she was featured as an Indian role model. Simply by her unique position she was granted instant tribal competency even though she was totally unaware of tribal or Indian issues.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH

Indian, American Indian or Native American?

As the concept of Indian-ness has changed and evolved so has the construct associated with the label. With regards to labeling and the effect upon identity Hecht, et al, (1993), in a discussion on African-American communication found that "identities are formed through naming or locating the self in socially recognizable categories." (p.47). Moreover, an identity is created by "applying these categorical labels to ourselves (e.g. woman, middle class, yuppie), and these identities are confirmed and validated (or disconfirmed and invalidated) through social interaction" (p. 47).

To understand the contemporary meanings and experiences associated with the labels of Indian, American Indian and Native American, an investigation should be conducted to determine how the label shapes and creates a sense of identity.

Defining the Contemporary Indian Experience

Today, more and more urban Indians are being assimilated into European-American culture with relatively few being socialized in a traditional manner. With the loss of language and the loss of tribally competent role models, people of Indian descent are struggling to find an identity. Yet there are few places to turn other than the images created in the media or perhaps college courses on Indian history and cultural awareness.

However, a primary source of "Indian-ness" for the urban Indian comes in the form of pow-wows which are sponsored by Indian clubs or urban Indian centers. Because of the diversity of tribes in urban areas there are not enough members of a single tribe to support a

particular tribe's dances or ceremonial type occasion, therefore, pow-wows serve as a mechanism in which all can participate. Consequently many different tribes band together out of each individual's desire to do something Indian or to find or retain an Indian contact in a hostile environment For many, the pow-wow serves as a surrogate for the cultural behaviors that are lacking in the urban environment.

In urban areas, a single tribe's cultural activities or language is not specifically taught or enacted. Instead, most urban Indians group together to participate in many neo-Indian activities which have a general Indian character rather than a particular tribal character. Many tribal elders consider this neo-Indianism as an activity in which "anything goes", e.g., anyone may enact, adopt, or even create their own type of psuedo-ceremonial activities.

Methods of Determining Cultural Competency or "Indian-ness"

When conducting research among Indian people a primary concern should be that of determining the cultural competency or tribal expertise of those who would be the focus of scientific inquiry (see Appendix B for an example of assessing tribal competency). With respect to previous research it appears that cultural competence has not been considered a factor when reporting results. Further it seems that to be considered as a recognizable and competent subject/participant/informant, all one had to do was self-identify, be identified by others, participate in a Native American studies program, or check the appropriate box on an application form.

Yet, personal and social identity goes beyond simply checking an appropriate box or self proclamation. Wieder and Pratt (1990), found that being an Indian or culturally-competent tribal member "is not something one can simply be, but is something one becomes and/or is, in and as the doing of being and becoming a real Indian" p. 50). They discovered that "doing" being and becoming a competent member requires the participation of other culturally competent members for a person must not only know how to "do" being and becoming a culturally competent member, but one must continue to practice what one knows, that is, comport oneself as an Indian.

In determining the cultural competency of subjects, or even to consider the Indian experience, factors should be considered such as: whether the subject or informant had been socialized in a traditional or non-traditional environment, knowledge of tribal language, participation in tribal ceremonial/religious activities, knowledge of tribal history, and amount of time spent in inter-tribal and intra-tribal activities.

CONCLUSION

For the contemporary Indian and for those who would do research among Indians it is difficult to describe or identify what the Indian experience is or even what constitutes Indian-ness. Yet the problem of identity is not simply a topic for scholarly investigation but a dilemma that Indian and Native American people face in both inter-cultural, inter-tribal and intra-tribal settings; determining the cultural identity and subsequent competency of those who present themselves as an Indian.

As the Indian culture has emerged, and in many areas, replaced tribal culture the notion of what constitutes an Indian identity has also changed. Before cultural competency can be automatically bestowed upon those whom we would conduct research among, we must first identify and explicate what this experience is rather than relying upon the homogenized pretend Indian that is depicted in the romanticized image created by the media.

APPENDIX A

On The Problematic and Consequential Nature of Indian-ness

The question of what constitutes "Indian-ness" is both problematic and consequential to members of the Indian community. Determining who is an Indian is problematic in that "Indian-ness to many scholars represent a set of tacit presuppositions that members of the Indian community adhere to, rather than something that is readily defined". (Pratt, 1985, p.29).

Indian-ness can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For the non-Indian, anyone who looks like an Indian, may be considered an Indian who has been socialized in a traditional lifestyle and is knowledgeable of Indian culture. However, Indian-ness to Indian people is a concept that espouses the eclectic life-styles of indigenous people which serves to unify the various tribal groups under one rubric.

Indian identity is not the same as tribal identity, which is derived from adherence to and acceptance of a unique lifestyle, although belonging to an Indian tribe is a constituent of Indian-ness. All tribes have differing languages and customs but under the rubric of Indian it is a generalization of a combination of various tribal lifeways, thus, it is this generalizability that creates Indian-ness.

Most reviewers, and those who conduct scholarly research concerning American Indians (or Native Americans) have questioned the generalizibility of the findings of studies that identify communicative behaviors of American Indians. The generalizabilty of the behaviors identified in scientific research are exactly that which constitute Indian-ness. For the purpose of this study I am concerned with communicative behaviors that are enacted "Indian-ly" as opposed to "tribal-ly". That is, a set of communicative behaviors which serves as a means for inter-tribal and "inter-Indian" interaction, rather than intra-tribal.

Let us consider the role of Indian-ness with regard to tribalism. For example, it is possible to be an Indian and an Osage; that is, a person who has been socialized in Osage culture and is accepted as an Osage by other Osages and also maintains an identity with members of other tribes.

He/she enacts appropriate communicative behaviors which enables acceptance by other Indians. Moreover, one can be an Indian but not be Osage. This person has been socialized in an urban or Indian environment, is accepted by other Indians, but has not been socialized into the Osage tribe and is not accepted by other Osages. Finally, it is also possible to be an Osage but not be an Indian. This individual has been socialized into the Osage culture, has limited contact with members of other tribes and primarily views his or her world from the cultural template created by Osage lifeways.

APPENDIX B
Osage Tribal Competency Exam

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1. In which year did the Osages move to the reservation area that they now occupy?
a. 1472
b. 1776
c. 1872
d. 1906

2. Wa-ti-an-ka was
a. the first Principle Chief of the Osage
b. signed the first treaty with the U.S.
c. responsible for bringing the Osages to Oklahoma
d. both a & b

3. If you are Zon-Zo-Li, then you are from
a. Hominy
b. Pawhuska
c. Nelogany
d. Gray Horse

4. _____was the first man to introduce the Osage people to the Native American Church.
a. Victor Griffith
b. Blackdog
c. Ho-ta-mole
d. John Wilson

5. When a man wears a red and blue blanket he would be designated as the
a. oldest son
b. second son
c. third son
d. tribal priest

6. Cedar is used in Osage ceremonies because
a. it is always in abundance
b. it represents eternal life
c. of an Osage legend
d. it represents the main Osage clan

7. The I-lon-shka is
a. a man's dance
b. a woman's dance
c. a naming ceremony
d. both a and c

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